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# THE THRONE IN ENGLAND.

BY JUSTIN M'CARTHY, M. P.

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“THE throne in danger !” used to be the alarm-cry of all the ancient Tories and other old fogies of a past generation in England. We never now hear a word about the throne being in danger. We have had during the last few years many measures passed into law which ought to have made the bones of the Eldons and Wetherells to turn in their graves. Of course, we have had plenty of talk about revolution and socialism and anarchy and so forth ; but, oddly enough, we have heard nothing about the throne being in danger. Now, I have often noticed in political life, both at home and abroad, that the very time when society comfortably settles down to the conviction that some particular institution is certain to last forever is also the very time when prudent friends of the institution would do well to consider seriously whether its future is quite so well assured as society’s opinion reports.

Is the throne of England in any immediate danger ? it will naturally be asked. So far as I can see, it is in no immediate danger whatever. Nobody threatens it ; no popular outcry is raised against it. Indeed, if one were to look only at the surfaces of things, he might be apt to believe that the throne is more firmly fixed in England now than it was some fifteen or sixteen years ago. Then there really did seem to be growing up in this country something like a republican party. Sir Charles Dilke first made himself prominent as one of the leaders, or, at least, one of the heralds, of a republican party. He went round some of the great cities and towns of the north of England and denounced the cost and the parsimony of royalty with much energy ; and a series of little riotings was the consequence, which observers on the European continent in some instances mistook for the overture to a revolution. At the same period, and in a debate started by Sir Charles Dilke in the House of Commons, Mr. Auberon Herbert, brother of the Conservative Earl of Car-

narvon, proclaimed himself a republican, and a wild scene of excitement followed, and a great many loyal members of the House seemed to have turned themselves for the moment into bellowing madmen. At that time, too, a little school of writers, some of them men of great capacity and distinction, used to proclaim themselves republicans and to publish articles commending the republican form of government. At great meetings of London workingmen republican principles were openly avowed, and were applauded to the echo that should applaud again. A very shrewd and self-possessed observer from within and not from without told me then that he fully expected to see within a short time an openly-republican party, small, indeed, but intellectual and influential, established in the House of Commons.

Time has gone by and there is no republican party established in the House of Commons ; nor do members of that House now hear a single word said about a republic. I do not quite know what the present opinions of Mr. Auberon Herbert are on the subject ; he seems lately to occupy himself with different topics altogether. I do not think it likely that the opinions of Sir Charles Dilke are changed ; but he has not for ever so many years said a word in public on the subject. The fact is that the subject has dropped. As Mr. Bright said at the time, the republican question had not really come up in England. It was put forward prematurely and had to be immaturely dropped. We had ever so many pressing matters to occupy us in Parliament and public life generally, and it was found that the republican question had little more than an academic interest, which in politics means no interest at all.

Therefore we hear nothing in England just now of any danger to the throne as an institution. But does that mean that the throne is necessarily to be perpetual ? Nothing of the kind—at least, it does not necessarily mean anything of the kind. It means that nobody thinks the throne an institution which requires to be at once reconsidered or remodelled or abolished. It is no pledge for the permanence of an institution in England that at some given time there is no talk about abolishing it. Take an illustration of this fact. Consider the case of the House of Lords. We hear very little now at public meetings about the reform or the abolition of the House of Lords. Does this mean that the public of England are growing better satisfied with the House of

Lords? Not at all. It only means that the people of England have more pressing work on hand than the reconstruction of the second Parliamentary chamber. Their hands are full just now. Until the Irish question is settled, no other large scheme of reform has the slightest chance of being taken in hand. But everybody knows perfectly well that as soon as the country has time to turn its attention that way the second chamber will be reconstructed. Take, again, the case of the Established Church in England. We do not hear nearly so much said on this subject as we used to hear some years ago. But the churchman would be sanguine indeed who ventured therefore to believe that the church is a permanent institution. Now, I am not comparing the throne of England with the House of Lords or with the Established Church. As regards the House of Lords the comparison would be quite absurd; for no one can doubt that a large proportion of the English people are profoundly convinced of the superiority of the monarchical system and are deeply attached to the throne and the reigning family, while no reasonable being professes to believe that there is a word to be said in favor of the hereditary principle in law-making. The case of the Established Church is a better illustration. Most churchmen are deeply attached to the state church as an institution; many firmly believe that its disestablishment would do great harm to the interests of religion. But I should fancy that there are few really thoughtful and observant Englishmen belonging to the Church of England who do not see that the principle of a state church cannot for very long be maintained in England. But here comes the difference between the church and the throne. A large mass of the population have for years and years proclaimed themselves uncompromisingly hostile to the state-church principle; there is no such open and avowed hostility to the principle of a limited monarchy. My object in bringing forward these illustrations is merely to show that the absence of any organized opposition to an institution, or, indeed, of any unfriendly criticism with regard to it, does not, in English public affairs, furnish any conclusive evidence that the institution is destined to be perpetual.

Let us try to get at some idea of the feeling of various classes in these countries towards the throne. As regards the present sovereign, there can be no doubt that wherever she is known she

is popular. I fully believe that she is, on the whole, the best queen that history has known. As a constitutional sovereign, her conduct has been without praise. In Scotland, where she is well known, she is much loved by the people. In Ireland, of course, she is practically forgotten. The vast mass of the people neither like nor dislike her; they know nothing about her; she never comes into their minds. It could not be otherwise; for, as far as Ireland is concerned, one must admit either that the sovereign has no personal duties toward that country or that the duties have not been discharged. From the royalist point of view this is deeply to be regretted; for the natural tendency of the Irish people is to be devotedly loyal: it must, indeed, have been a persistent neglect that could have so completely extinguished the feeling of loyalty in the Irish people. For myself I am not at all sorry for it. I do not admire that fervor of personal devotion to this, that, and the other sovereign. There seems to me to be something unmanly and unwholesome about it; I think my countrymen are much better without it. However, there is a plain fact to carry in our minds while we are considering this subject—the fact that the vast majority of the people in one of these islands do not feel the slightest interest in the maintenance of the monarchical principle in Great Britain. Of course, I do not venture to say whether this condition of feeling in Ireland might not be greatly changed, say, by the sight of a sovereign going over every year to open a national parliament in Dublin. I am only telling of what actually exists in Irish feeling and the reason for its existence.

How are things in England and in Scotland? Undoubtedly the wealthier classes almost everywhere in England and Scotland are in favor of the monarchical principle. They like royalty and all its surroundings—the effect it has on society, the distinctions it maintains and confers, the social honors which it offers as a prize to wealth. In London, and among the class of people who come up to London for the season, the throne is like the sun; their world would be dark without it. The prime beauty and glory of their lives would have gone out if had they not a Court to go to and to talk about. It is a great day in a girl's life when she gets presented at Court. The Prince and Princess of Wales are personally very popular—he with a very large circle; she with everybody. I never heard any one say a word of the Princess of Wales except in her praise. When I make a certain qualification with

regard to the Prince, it is because there is a section of the older nobility who do not profess quite to admire the way in which the hospitalities of Marlborough House are conducted. They do not find the principle of selection very carefully applied there. They would not much like to be associated with the place and its various companionships. They would rather that the Queen herself were at the head of society in London again, controlling and directing it. All these, however, are, of course, thoroughly loyal to the monarchical principle and to the reigning house. It may, perhaps, be news to some Americans to be told that even still there are among the English nobility a small, a very small, number of men and women who do not go to Court because they cannot in their consciences admit that Victoria is the lawful Queen of England. They are still faithful to the Stuart tradition; although they have not the faintest dream or hope of a Stuart restoration, and are as little likely to trouble the reigning house as the Bench of Bishops are likely to do. But, as one of this small group—I do not know whether they can even be properly called a group—once said to me, “to admit the existence of a fact does not prevent your conscience from judging of it.” So they obey their consciences and maintain that there is no real sovereign but a Sovereign of Divine Right. These men and women do not count for anything in the question we are now considering. I only mention them because I think their position is worthy of notice and, in a certain sense, is highly interesting.

All “society,” then, in England is monarchical and is attached to the reigning family. This is perfectly correct as a general statement and will not be seriously affected by the fact that among the aristocracy there is to be found here and there a theoretical republican. Society in England is monarchical; wealth also is monarchical. The London shopkeeper, of the West End at all events, is monarchical and loyal. He depends for much of his living and his success in life upon the Court and the classes who frequent it; and M. Josse was a jeweller, as we all know. Of course, the great land-owners are all monarchical,—and so are most of the new rich men. But the loyalty of the territorial magnate is a tradition, and that of the new rich man is a condition of respectability. In any time of great national convulsion, the territorial magnate and the new rich man would

not count for much. The working classes and the poor will always have to count for much. I do not want to exaggerate the evidences to be found in recent popular movements here of a growing tendency to socialism. But I think the man must be blind who does not see that there are such evidences. The reader will presently see their bearing on the subject of this article.

The main bulwarks of the throne in England are, or I should rather, perhaps, say were, three in number. First and most ancient was the sentiment of loyalty, more or less deeply tinctured with the principle of divine right. Then there came—a sentiment or a conviction of much later birth—the comfortable belief that monarchy was an institution necessary for the stability of a state. The errors and extravagances of the first French Revolution strengthened this idea very much in the minds of Englishmen in a past generation; the doings of the Commune had an effect of a somewhat similar nature at a time nearer to the present. The English *bourgeois* got it into his head that only a monarchy could keep a state stable and prosperous. The feeling of security was the second great sustainer of monarchy in England. The third—the one great sustaining power now—is the quiet love of Englishmen for old-established institutions and their strong dislike to any manner of sudden and violent change. Now, let us consider how these chief securities of the throne have been affected by modern conditions in England. I think it will hardly be disputed that the old-fashioned, chivalric, sentimental feeling of personal loyalty has little or no active existence among English populations just now. We do not profess any longer to worship and adore any royal personage. We do not believe that the king's face gives grace, as the old ballad puts it. We should as soon think of professing to believe in the healing charm of the royal touch for the king's evil. These beliefs and professions were the natural companions of the principle of divine right; and they faded with it. There is no place for them in the practical life of the modern world. An Englishman now feels the highest respect for the monarchy and for the royal family; but it is a respect which has nothing whatever of the romantic in it. Some Englishmen and many more English women adore the Court and the throne and the members of the royal family with the adoration of the snob for rank and the mean hope of the snob that he or she may be allowed to come within the light of their glory. But that feeling is not in the

least like the old-world sentiment of loyalty. The people who cherish this more modern principle of devotion are not people who would be of the slightest use to the throne if the throne were in any danger. The worth of the monarchy to them is the fact that it keeps a Court around it at which it is believed to be a social distinction to be presented; and that it gives opportunity for a Marlborough House, where one may be invited occasionally to a dinner party or a ball; and that there are princes and princesses who may be prevailed upon to honor with their presence one's own dinner party or one's own ball. I leave it to my readers to judge for themselves how far this sort of loyalty could be reckoned on as the cheap defence of an endangered throne.

The second great safeguard of the monarchical system in England has been losing much of its strength. Even the British Philistine now does not believe that a republic means anarchy and confusion, battle, murder, and sudden death. The wild students in Henri Murger's "*Bohemia*" found that the pavement of a republic wears out one's boots as well as the pavement of a monarchy. The British Philistine is finding out, for his part, that a man may have boots to wear under a republic as well as under a monarchy. He sees that people manage to get on pretty well in the United States and that there is no more fear of a revolution in Wall Street or on Broadway than there is in Threadneedle Street or Pall Mall. The example of the French Republic so far has been reassuring to the ordinary Englishman. He has been able to see that even a French Republic can have its fierce political struggles and partisan rivalries and can get through them without recourse to the bayonets or the barricades. If the French Republic only continues firm and orderly for a few years more, the effect of that example will do a great deal—one can hardly say how much—towards familiarizing the mind of England with the idea that a Republic even in Europe may be just as stable, as orderly, and as strong as a monarchy. This would not precipitate a change of constitutional system here; but it would do much towards preparing the way for it. The English people would begin to ask themselves why they should not work a system which other people can work so well. The monarchical system stripped of the old romantic and poetic associations, and judged strictly with regard to its practical value and virtue, would not show well in comparison with a



republic such as you have in the United States. The English people are, in my opinion, peculiarly well fitted to work a republic. They are, by nature and tendency, orderly and law-abiding. Then the very merits, public and private, of the present Sovereign have tended to make people used to a national life in which the monarch takes little or no part. Because the Queen is faithful to her constitutional duty it has become evident that the Ministry governs; that is, that a majority of the House of Commons governs; that is, that a majority of the people governs; and that the machinery would work on pretty much the same without a sovereign as with one. In a different way, the Queen's devotion to the memory of her lost husband, withdrawing her from society and public life for so many years, has left her little more than a mere name in the mind of the younger generation.

Some of the new conditions of things are tending, therefore,—I do not say to prepare the way for a republic, but to bring about a general willingness to entertain the idea of a republic in these islands. I do not want to go any farther than that; and I know quite well that a sudden failure of the French Republic would have a strong effect in the other direction.

I admit to the full the third great support of the monarchy—the traditional objection of the ordinary Englishman to sudden change of system. I very much doubt whether there are a hundred Englishmen to-day, even among professing republicans, or even among English republican artisans, who would put out a hand for the purpose of abolishing the monarchy merely because they would themselves be pleased if it were abolished. The existence of the monarchy does not occupy much of their thoughts. They look on the Queen as an excellent wife and mother—a character which the English working-man greatly respects; and they believe that the Prince of Wales is “a jolly good fellow.” Therefore there is at present no feeling of direct and active hostility to the monarchical institution which could put it in the slightest danger. Therein I am ready to agree with the most devoted upholder of the system of monarchy. But the difference between us is that he is, doubtless, of opinion that this means perpetuity of tenure for the institution, and I am not. But I am quite willing to admit that the monarchy might possibly be allowed to go on forever in England if nothing else were to harm it more than the

mere spread of the belief that a republican system represents a better idea. We do not make revolutions in English constitutional life for ideas. That is not the Englishman's way. Perhaps it proves the superior brightness and activity of the minds of other peoples that they are ready to take no end of trouble to get their political systems into harmony with what they believe to be the best political theories. But so far as the Englishman is concerned, such peoples may "resolute till the cows come home"; they cannot "resolute" him into the Quixote of a political idea.

No one, I think, will complain that I have not taken full account of this great safeguard of the throne in England—the ordinary Englishman's dislike to change. Where, then, is any danger to the throne likely to come from? One very common danger to other thrones can hardly be feared for the throne of England. It is not in the least likely that there will be any difficulties about the succession. Whence is the danger to come? Well, suppose, for example, that we were to have at any time another George the Third—a conscientious, wrong-headed, obstinate man, who would insist on interfering in foreign politics; in overruling his ministers; in directing a foreign policy of his own. It is surely not impossible that such a monarch might come up again in England. Now, let us go on supposing a little more. Let us suppose that the policy of such a sovereign were to involve us in war—in a war which the people generally did not like. Let us suppose that a conscientious and popular minister resigned office rather than carry out the war policy, and knowing that he could not get the King to accept his ideas. Very well, some other minister is found; England goes into a struggle which her people do not like; and suppose that under some conditions of peculiar disadvantage her armies are defeated at first. Does any one believe that the throne would be able to withstand this shock? I certainly do not. The English people are wholly unused to defeat; I mean, of course, the defeat of one of their great armies in a great war. They could bear with patience a little reverse in South Africa, because all the world must know that it was but a mere accident, to be retrieved as soon as they could send out the men to do it. But a defeat of an English army at the hands of the Germans or the Russians—what a ferment of national passion would not that create in England! And if it were known that the policy of the Sovereign had made the war which had opened

with such disaster, is it not quite on the cards that the crown might get knocked off in the convulsion ?

Of course, no such crisis could arise in the life of Queen Victoria. She has always been, as I have said, a thoroughly constitutional sovereign. Several times has there occurred in her reign a crisis where England seemed to be brought quite to the edge of a great war and where it was commonly understood that the sentiments of "the classes" went one way and the sentiments of "the masses" went the other. The Queen was supposed to have her inclinings, like other people ; but if she had them then, unlike other people she kept them to herself, and they were not allowed to interfere for one instant with her duty as a constitutional sovereign. If she had been a woman of a different character, she might have found without much difficulty some statesman willing to persuade himself that her views were right and were his views also. The same that is said for the Queen may, I have no doubt, be said for the Prince of Wales. I do not suppose there would be the slightest likelihood of that genial and experienced man of the world attempting to be his own foreign minister, or, indeed, having any relish whatever for the work of such an office. Therefore I can say readily that I do not see any immediate chance of danger to the monarchy from undue and disastrous interference on the part of the sovereign. In any case, the danger would, according to my view of possibilities, be confined to the field of foreign policy. I can hardly imagine an English sovereign now setting himself against the wish of the great majority of the people on any question of domestic policy. Every one understands the domestic policy too well. The nation cannot be plunged blindfold into disastrous domestic legislation. But foreign policy is a totally different thing. The English people have often been led quite unconsciously up to the very verge of a foreign war, into which they never could have been plunged with their eyes open. Then at the moment of crisis it is so easy to get up a cry that the flag of England has been insulted and that the national honor requires to be vindicated. An interfering, headstrong sovereign and a pliant minister would have little trouble between them in so managing things as to make the people of England believe for the moment that the war, which was the fruit of the king's and the minister's own policy, was forced on them by the aggressive policy of a foreign state. Then suppose a late

awakening, disillusion, disappointment, defeat, disaster ; and the war has still to be carried on ; victory has to be struggled for at any risk, and struggled for unsuccessfully again and again,—and in the meantime what ? Would the fall of the ministry, would even the impeachment of the ministry, satisfy the national idea ? I, for one, do not think it would. Impeachment is obsolete in England. Popular revolution is never obsolete.

I do not attach much or, indeed, any importance to the fact that vast crowds of Londoners turn out to see any public performance in which any member of the royal family takes a part. The ordinary every-day life of the humble Londoner is so dull and barren that he is delighted at any opportunity of staring at anything. A company or two of infantry passing along Buckingham Palace Road will be followed for a mile by an excited crowd of gazers. The Lord Mayor's show on the ninth of November paralyzes all the traffic of that part of London through which it passes. The streets are literally blocked up by a crowd that stretches for miles ; every window along the line of procession is alive with faces ; extemporized rows of benches and seats are erected in the thoroughfares everywhere ; the very roofs of the houses are covered with spectators. What does all this mean ? Does it mean that the people of London are devoted to the Lord Mayor and are ready to lay down their lives in defence of the aldermen and the Common Council ? Nothing of the kind. Outside certain official circles, nobody in London cares three straws for the Lord Mayor or would have the slightest objection to his institution being submerged in the new County Council for London, over which Lord Rosebery presides. To a vast population, not merely in England, but even in London itself, the sovereign is only as another Lord Mayor—a sight to be stared at on some rare occasion. The institution of royalty has no concern with their daily lives ; it is not made by them or for them ; it would not make the slightest difference to them if it were to be abolished to-morrow. They have no sentimental feeling of any kind about it. I do not believe that with the majority of such people there is any active feeling of dislike to it ; I think there is no feeling either way. I am speaking now of what I may call the inert mass of the population.

But I am inclined to think that among the radical artisans in the great towns there is a good deal of dissatisfaction

and discontent smouldering rather than burning. Such men grumble very much now and then at the cost of royalty; at the number of German princes and princesses quartered on the country; at the successive demands for marriage portions for this, that, and the other member of the royal family. There is much of the Socialist spirit spreading through the great towns, where the contrast between growing wealth on one side and growing poverty on the other is forced upon the attention of hard-working, ill-paid, ill-fed men and women. It is perfectly true that, if all the money voted annually to all the various members of the royal family were distributed among the poor of England, the national distress would not be sensibly alleviated. But hungry people do not argue in that way. They only see that enormous sums of money are yearly paid to a certain family, and they ask what that particular family is doing to earn the money. In London, at all events, the newspapers in by far the largest circulation among the poor are the radical Sunday papers, which are always attacking and denouncing the manner in which public money is lavished on the royal family. Take a very different sort of paper read by a very different class; I mean my friend Mr. Labouchère's *Truth*. *Truth* is high-priced; it lies on drawing-room tables and club tables; it is not read by the poor; it is a "society" paper altogether. Yet it is constantly showing up the cost of royalty, the sham offices created to gratify royalty's relatives and friends, the waste of public money on royalty's empty palaces and disused parks. Society, as I have said, is decidedly loyal; yet it reads and perhaps quietly chuckles over Mr. Labouchère's remarks, all the same.

The sum of all this as it shows itself to me may be put in a few lines. The glamour of the throne in England is gone. The dread of republican institutions is gone also. The vast majority of the population care nothing about royalty. There is nothing to hold on to, if from any cause royalty were to make itself unpopular in England at the time of some great national crisis. It is, at least, not impossible that we may one day have a bad king in this country; and in that case it seems to me that a complete change of system would be a more natural and probable event than a mere change in the succession.

JUSTIN MCCARTHY.